

Discussion Guide

to accompany the Youth Voices on Maine PBS videos

Introduction:

The Youth Voices on Maine PBS videos bring viewers four programs exploring issues of alcohol use through the eyes of Maine's young people. As with any video, it is essential to preview the programs before use to determine whether one or more, in part or in full, will be appropriate and effective with your audience. The issues addressed are very difficult and highly charged emotional issues that are not easy to discuss. Therefore, these videos will not be appropriate in every setting and should be used with careful forethought and planning. However, because they were created with extensive youth direction and involvement, and because they address tough issues thoughtfully and honestly, they hold great potential for inspiring serious and valuable discussion about alcohol's impact in Maine communities.

How to get a copy of the Youth Voices on Maine PBS videos:

1. Any agency or organization in Maine may borrow a copy for short-term loan from the Office of Substance Abuse Information and Resource Center (1-800-499-0027).
2. Copies of the videos are available to Maine educators through the Maine State Library's Educational Video Services (EVS) program (207-287-5620).
3. For general audience requests and out-of-state educators, contact:
Maine PBS Audience Services
1450 Lisbon Street
Lewiston, ME 04240
(207) 783-9101
1-800-884-1717

Acknowledgements:

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Maine Youth Voices and Youth Voices on Maine PBS are supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice or other supporting agencies.

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This information is available in alternate formats upon request.

For more information, contact:
Maine Office of Substance Abuse
Information and Resource Center
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Email: osa.ircosa@maine.gov
Web: www.maineosa.org
Created: September 2001
Revised: September, 2003

Background:

Maine Youth Voices is a unique youth-driven project that actively involves young people in examining issues related to alcohol in Maine communities. This project provides opportunities for youth to educate adults about the messages that young people receive regarding alcohol use in our society, and to work toward changing the norms around underage drinking in their communities. Currently, there are 11 Maine Youth Voices groups around the state. Each group consists of up to 30 high school and/or middle school youth, supported by an adult coordinator and a sponsoring organization.

Maine Youth Voices was created in 1998 as a project of the Office of Substance Abuse, funded by a federal grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. It is managed and supported by AdCare Educational Inc. For more information on Maine Youth Voices, check out the website at <http://www.neias.org/MYV/> or call Project Director Dave Cross at 207-626-3615.

A special collaboration began in 1999-00 between Maine Youth Voices and Maine PBS. Maine PBS worked with four Maine Youth Voices groups, guiding them through the design and production of their own public service announcements (PSAs). At the same time, a Maine PBS producer and crew created a documentary that followed the efforts of these four groups, culminating in the completion of their PSAs. This documentary, Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2000 (Program I) premiered in May of 2000. The collaboration continued with a second production in the 2000-01 school year, resulting in Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2001 (Program II) which premiered in May of 2001. This time, Maine PBS worked with a second set of four Maine Youth Voices groups, each of whom created their own 5-7 minute mini-documentary or dramatic production analyzing some facet of the underage drinking issue in their communities. The collaboration continued for a third and fourth year, with productions completed in the spring of 2002 and 2003. Each year, the program has examined underage drinking issues from a new angle and from the perspective of different groups of youth who are concerned about the problem.

For additional information and an on-line discussion forum on the Youth Voices on Maine PBS project, please visit <http://www.mainepbs.org/youthvoices/index.html>.

Planning for a good discussion:¹

Carefully selected video segments can be an effective way to open up a discussion on a sensitive subject. The two Youth Voices on Maine PBS videos portray the multi-faceted issues related to underage drinking and alcohol use in Maine communities, and reflect the many levels of complex choices that we all face, both as individuals and as a society. They can be used to encourage participants to discuss whether these issues and concerns apply to their own communities, and to explore potential solutions and action steps. **Because alcohol issues can be very personal and emotionally charged, it is important to consider the potential impact on participants both during and after the discussion, and to be prepared with a support and/or referral plan should one or more participants express a need for help or intervention.**

When organizing such a discussion, be aware that participants will vary greatly in their desire to discuss controversial or difficult issues honestly. Each person must have the freedom to participate at his or her own level of comfort. Emotions about alcohol issues may run the gamut from apathy to empathy to fear, anger, and grief. While it is critical to recognize the validity of all emotional reactions and insights, a discussion is not, and should not be, a group counseling session or support group. It is possible to have a great discussion on alcohol issues without incorporating participants' personal experiences, but it takes thoughtful planning and facilitation. In most group discussions involving youth, especially in classroom settings, personal disclosure about alcohol use should be avoided. Some suggestions for a productive discussion include:

- Discourage personal disclosure explicitly when framing the discussion, pointing out that the purpose of the discussion is not to have participants share their individual experiences but to examine objectively the larger issues around how communities approach alcohol-related problems.
- Prepare specific and targeted questions that keep the discussion focused on the larger social and policy questions, rather than on participants' personal experiences.
- Incorporate additional written materials (i.e. newspaper articles, survey results, legislation, research studies, magazine advertisements, etc) from which examples and details can be drawn to enhance the discussion.

One more word of caution: many people, youth included, tend to overestimate the frequency and amount that the “typical” teenager drinks. In spite of common misperceptions that “everybody does it,” the 2002 Maine Drug and Alcohol Use Survey revealed that in fact most students do not use alcohol. Among the more than 50,000 students in grades 6-12 who participated in the survey, 45% had never used alcohol at all. More than two-thirds (70%) had not used any alcohol within the past month; even among 12th graders, the majority reported that they had not used any alcohol at all in the month before the survey. **It is crucial in any discussion on underage drinking issues, that we are careful not to contribute, even unintentionally, to the myth that everybody drinks. It is particularly important to help youth who have made healthy choices and who are not using alcohol see that they are “the norm”, and that the majority of their peers are making the same healthy choices, even though they might often get a different impression from the media and other sources.**

¹ Also see the last page of this guide for a brief overview of roundtables/study circles, which are one particular type of discussion that many schools and communities in Maine have used for effective discussions on a variety of topics.

Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2000 (Program I)

This 30-minute program documents the progress of four Maine Youth Voices groups who are tackling the issues of underage drinking. Each group has had to address special concerns in their individual communities.

[Carrabec High School](#) students are dealing with life in a rural mill town and kids who claim that the only source of entertainment is alcohol.

[Fort Kent](#) students are combating the problem of being on the U.S.-Canadian border. The drinking age in Canada is younger than in the States and young people simply drive 4 miles across a bridge and are able to buy alcohol.

[Indian Island](#) students are fighting against the negative stereotypes of Native Americans related to alcohol. Alcohol has destroyed many traditions and families in their community.

[Gorham](#) students are up against a community where many community members want to think “it doesn’t happen here.” This group is focusing on education about underage drinking.

Each of these groups faces individual challenges, but all of them have a common goal - to keep young people in Maine from using alcohol. By leading study circles, writing plays, creating posters and producing public service announcements, these **Youth Voices** are being heard across our state.

Maine PBS production crews helped the students take a proactive approach in addressing their concerns through the creation of television public service announcements. The students had the opportunity to work side-by-side with producers, videographers and editors as they took a hands-on role in the production process. In this half-hour documentary, Maine PBS shares with viewers the students' efforts, including their completed public service announcements.

Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2000 (Program I) provides an insightful look at the integrity and vision of the young people of Maine told in their own words.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. How are the issues that each group is facing different, depending on the characteristics of their community? What common threads emerge across all four? Do these commonalities extend to Maine and/or the nation as a whole?
2. What are some of the reasons that these youth express for wanting to address alcohol issues in their communities? What are some other reasons (that youth might have for wanting to see change) that weren't expressed in the video?
3. What are some ways in which adults provide mixed messages to youth about the acceptability of alcohol use by teenagers? What could be done to help reduce the mixed messages and provide more consistent messages?
4. Discuss each of the four public service announcements that the groups created:
 - a. Who is the intended target audience(s)?
 - b. What message(s) is communicated?
 - c. What does the group who designed it want the intended target audience(s) to do or think differently as a result of seeing the public service announcement?
 - d. How effective do you think this public service announcement would be in reaching its target audience, communicating its message, and accomplishing its goal of changing the targeted behavior/ attitude?
5. If you had the opportunity to create a public service announcement with the goal of reducing underage drinking:
 - a. what target audience would you want to reach?
 - b. what message would you want to get to that target audience?
 - c. what would you want the target audience to do/think differently as a result of seeing your public service announcement?
6. Many people across Maine have seen this program, either when it aired on Maine PBS, or on video. Can a television program change the way people think or act? What do you think youth in Maine communities might understand or do differently as a result of watching this program? What do you think adults in Maine communities might understand or do differently as a result of watching this program? If you think this program will lead to change, why – what makes it effective? If you think it won't lead to change, why not – what would keep it from being effective?

Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2001 (Program II)

For the second consecutive year, Maine PBS brought its viewers a program exploring issues of alcohol use through the eyes of Maine's young people. In 2000, the program focused on the stories of middle- and high-school students from Gorham, Indian Island, Carrabec, and Fort Kent. In the 2001 program, young people from another four Maine Youth Voices groups worked with Maine PBS to design their own 5-7 minute productions focusing on issues surrounding alcohol in Maine's communities. As the young people identified specific areas of concern regarding alcohol use, Maine PBS's production crews turned their tools over to the students to help them take a proactive approach in addressing their concerns. The students had the opportunity to work side-by-side with Maine PBS producers, videographers, and editors as they took a hands-on role in the production process.

Cumberland County Youth Voices: This group chose a documentary format to examine the causes, frequency, and consequences of underage drinking and its impact on the entire community. The students in the group live in primarily suburban areas where the students say they feel underage drinking is often viewed as a "rite of passage" and as a way to escape boredom. Students include newspaper stories surrounding the death of a classmate in the summer of 2000, who was killed in a drunk-driving accident a month before he was to enter his senior year. Especially poignant is the testimony of one girl, who describes how her friend's death has affected her, as well as other classmates, family and community members. The program features interviews with students who ask each other questions such as: Why do teens drink? How easy is it for minors to buy alcohol? Where do they go to drink? And do teens drive after drinking? The group's aim is to create an awareness surrounding underage drinking, rather than to "preach" a message. Locations for filming featured Portland Head Light, Portland's Old Port section and local teen gathering places.

New Surry Theatre Youth Voices: This group created a dramatization to dispel myths such as all "popular people" drink and that teen drinking is fun. It also reveals some potential legal, physical and emotional consequences of underage drinking. The production features a theatrical depiction of a party, where all the teens are drinking except for one girl. As the party, and the drinking progresses, the effects of alcohol can clearly be seen, as people lose control and common sense. As a result, two boys get into a fight, and the police arrive at the home and make arrests as teens are shown fleeing from all corners of the home. While all this is going on, the scene switches to what those teens could be doing - creating careers that reach their dreams - instead of drinking at a party. Filming was done at various locations throughout Blue Hill as well as the Bucksport Police Department.

Ashland Youth Voices: The Ashland LEAD (Leadership Education and Development) team created a dramatization focusing on what can happen to a teen who drinks, with an emphasis on the fact that it can happen to ANY teen who drinks. The documentary features the story of a teen in a rural community. The teen in the documentary repeatedly engages in underage drinking, which leads to the deterioration of relationships at school and home and ultimately, a feeling of hopelessness for the future. Filming took place at Ashland Community High School as well as various locations throughout the community.

Rangeley's Bonsai Youth Voices: Finding alternatives to underage drinking and the "community norms" regarding alcohol use by adults is the focus of the documentary produced by the Bonsai Task Force. Students interviewed each other about "Snowdeo," a yearly event where some 10,000 snowmobilers converge for a weekend of activities that sometimes include drinking. A major sponsor of Snowdeo is a beer company, and the sponsor's banners are visible throughout the community welcoming snowmobilers to the annual event. Students also interviewed parents about messages sent by alcohol-sponsored events such as Snowdeo, and a game warden whose job it is to enforce laws prohibiting operating a snowmobile while under the influence. In addition, students highlighted alternative activities to underage drinking such as skiing, snowboarding and spending time at the community youth center, where teens can have fun in a safe environment. Filming was done at the Snowdeo on Rangeley Lake, Rangeley Lakes Regional School, the youth center and various locations throughout Rangeley.

Suggested Discussion Questions: *(for any one of the four pieces in isolation, or for the entire 30-minute video)*

1. Discuss one of the four pieces (and/or compare and contrast across several or all four):
 - a. what target audience(s) do you think this group was trying to reach?
 - b. what message(s) do you think they were trying to get to their target audience(s)?
 - c. what do you think they want their target audience(s) to think or do differently as a result of seeing their production?
2. What are some of the reasons that these youth seem to have for wanting to get involved in this project and trying to change the impact of alcohol in their community?
3. Is what you see in this video different from more “typical” television shows? If so, how? How is the use and impact of alcohol typically portrayed? How are youth typically portrayed? What are some reasons why “mainstream” television shows would be different from this program?
4. Imagine that you have been hired as a consultant to this community (choose one, or break down into smaller groups to focus on the four different communities), because after seeing this video they decided that they really wanted to do everything possible to reduce underage drinking and the problems that are related to it. Assuming that money is no object (all the funding necessary is available), brainstorm things that the community would need to do to have an impact on the problem. What would be the roles of each of the following in your set of solutions?
 - youth
 - parents
 - school officials
 - law enforcement
 - other adult community members
 - store owners
 - media outlets (tv, radio, newspapers, etc)
 - others???

Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2002 (Program III)

For the third consecutive year, Maine PBS collaborated with three Maine Youth Voices groups and the University of Southern Maine to make adults aware of the many issues surrounding underage drinking.

Oxford Hills: This group focused on adults in their community. Many adults see underage drinking as a rite of passage and are naïve about the problems it causes in the community. Parents may not have the skills to address underage drinking issues. Students can help adults by being honest about the issues.

Harrington: This group looked at underage drinking and driving and how it not only impacts the driver but others as well. Parents should pay more attention to what their children are doing and set boundaries (curfews etc.). Community members should get more involved in providing healthy activities year round.

Danforth: This all male group addresses the issue of role modeling by adults. Youth need help from adults to make good decisions. Adults in their community need to be aware that the youth learn from them, both in positive and negative ways.

USM: This college group describes the Resident Assistant position and responsibilities regarding alcohol use. The group provides educational programming on substance use to other students. They discuss the misperception that all college students drink, and drink to excess. They emphasize that parents should stay in contact with their college students and continue to role model healthy behaviors.

Suggested Discussion Questions (Program III)

For Youth audience:

1. How would you want your parents to address the issues of underage drinking with you? How will you plan to address underage drinking issues when/if you are the parent of a teenager?
2. Some teens say they drink because “there is nothing else to do.” Is this true? What are teens who aren’t drinking doing? Discuss how communities and schools can address this issue.
3. What are some ways in which adults provide mixed messages to youth about the acceptability of alcohol use by teenagers?
4. What advice would you give to adults in your community who want to help young people make healthy/safe choices and avoid drinking?

For Adult audience (i.e. parent groups):

1. What are ways that parents and other adults can talk to teens about alcohol that will be most likely to encourage them delay their use of alcohol?
2. Surveys and studies have shown that youth most commonly get alcohol from home, parents and older friends. What do communities need to do so that adults are aware of the consequences of providing alcohol youth, both in terms of the legal consequences and the effects of role modeling unhealthy and illegal behaviors?
3. For adolescents, this is a time for testing their limits but need parents to set boundaries to keep them safe. What are different ways that parents can most effectively set and enforce limits for their teenage children?
4. Why do many parents “back off” when their children enter college? What can parents do to help their children make healthy choices even when they aren’t living at home anymore?

For a college parent audience:

1. What do/did you tell your child about alcohol and other drug use as they prepare(d) to head off to college?
2. What do you wish your parents had told you when you were their age?
3. What are the dangers of high risk drinking? Are these dangers less or more important to consider among college students than among younger students?
4. Why do so many people have misperceptions that more college students drink than really do?
Why do so many students choose not to drink?

Youth Voices on Maine PBS, 2003 (Program IV)

Young people ages 12 to 22 from the communities of Eastport, Jonesport, South Portland, and St. Joseph's College have produced public service announcements aimed at reaching their peers. Each group identified a message relating to alcohol use and what role social norms play in underage drinking in Maine's communities. They address issues such as misperceptions that alcohol is more popular than it is in reality, and the false belief that more youth drink than really do. In addition, these students helped create a half-hour documentary in which their peers and various professionals share opinions and observations about underage drinking and public misperceptions.

The Eastport (Shead High School) Maine Youth Voices group is dedicated to examining issues surrounding underage alcohol use in America's eastern most city. The group's main objective is to identify and change community norms associated with underage drinking and to generate awareness. The target audience for their PSA was high school athletes.

Jonesport-Beals High School has been a part of Maine Youth Voices for the past three years. The group meets every week after school to plan events, including collaborating with a group called the Bridge Coalition whose primary mission is to prevent relationship violence. Their goal for this year is to increase community awareness about underage drinking, and to convince teens not everyone is drinking alcohol. They would also like to show people there are other ways to have fun besides drinking. The target audience for their PSA was high school students.

Students Teaching Other People (STOP) is a South Portland improvisational interactive youth theater troupe that educates teens and adults around the issues of underage drinking and bullying. South Portland Police Officers participate as moderators for the educational sessions. STOP audiences have consisted of fraternal groups, senior citizens, parents and students at Freshman Orientation nights, parent groups, as well as youth in schools from grades Kindergarten through high school. The target audience for their PSA was 9th graders.

The Saint Joseph's College Peer Educators are a group of dedicated students who are specially trained to address health and wellness issues among their peers through creative, energetic and accurate programming. With a commitment to community involvement and service, the Peer Educators have made several of their programs available to local high schools. Through their innovative programming, the group earned the Saint Joseph's College Innovator Award for the 2001-2002 academic year. The target audience for their PSA was first year college students.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

1. Explain social norms theory.
2. Why are exaggerated misperceptions about how much other people drink so common? Why do people have such an exaggerated sense of other people's drinking?
3. Do you think these exaggerated misperceptions happen among adults as well, or is it a youth phenomenon?
4. What can youth do to correct these misperceptions? What can adults do?
5. If efforts to correct the misperceptions were successful, and people realized that most youth are actually making safe, healthy, and legal choices most of the time, do you think it would affect people's decisions? Would it reduce the sense of social pressure to drink?

Resources for more information on underage drinking and alcohol issues:

(note: this is not intended to be a complete listing of valuable websites - simply a useful starting point. Inclusion here should not be construed or interpreted as an endorsement.)

Maine Office of Substance Abuse, Information and Resource Center
1-800-499-0027
<http://www.maineosa.gov/irc>

Center for Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Georgetown University
<http://www.camy.org>

Center for Science in the Public Interest, [Alcohol Policies Project](#)
<http://www.cspinet.org/booze/index.html>

FACE, Truth and Clarity about Alcohol
http://faceproject.org/website/new_web/index_5.html

Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention
<http://www.edc.org/hec/>

Join Together, a resource to help communities working to stop substance abuse and gun violence
<http://www.jointogether.org/>

Marin Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems
<http://www.marininstitute.org/>

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
<http://www.madd.org/madd/home/>

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University
<http://www.casacolumbia.org/>

National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, Impaired Driving Division
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/alcohol/>

Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies
<http://www.edc.org/capt>

Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Center for Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws
<http://www.udetc.org/>

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, U.S. Dept of Health and Human Services
<http://www.health.org/>

Trauma Foundation, Alcohol Related Injuries and Violence Project
<http://www.tf.org/tf/alcohol/ariv/index.html>

University of Minnesota, Alcohol Epidemiology Program
<http://www.epi.umn.edu/alcohol/policy/default.html>

Roundtables (a.k.a. Study Circles)*

Roundtables are: A democratic discussion led by neutral facilitators focused on a specific and interesting topic

Roundtables are not:

- A debate
- A focus group
- A brainstorming session
- A method of action planning
- A class discussion led by a teacher

The facilitators' role is:

- To establish a safe and comfortable atmosphere
- To enforce the ground rules if the members of the group do not do so
- To ask questions to guide the discussion, and probe deeper when appropriate
- To be sure that everyone has opportunities to speak and nobody dominates
- To encourage the group members to interact with each other not just answer the facilitator's questions
- To raise questions that draw out additional points of view that may not be represented in the discussion
- To summarize key points when appropriate
- To record highlights if desired and ask participants to fill out evaluations

The facilitators' role is not:

- To present his/her opinion
- To judge the opinion of others
- To dominate the discussion with constant questions
- To establish the right answer
- To come up with a plan of action

Roundtables often:

- Follow a format that includes:
 1. Welcome/introductions/icebreaker
 2. Setting ground rules & explanation of facilitators' role
 3. Discussion starter (i.e. brief reading/video, scenario, opening question, etc)
 4. Discussion of different viewpoints/opinions and follow-up questions
 5. Summary and next steps if appropriate
- Include silence
- Meet more than once
- Have two facilitators
- Empower youth through facilitation skills/opportunities and an equal discussion

The purpose of a roundtable is:

- To build relationships among participants
- To share diverse points of view on an important topic
- To learn how others feel/think and understand why they think/feel that way
- To come to a better understanding as a group about a problem or issue
- To discuss important issues in a calm and safe atmosphere without the goal of convincing others to change their opinion
- Potentially (but not necessarily) to come up with a solution or action based on the discussion

* Note: This information is based on the work of the Study Circle Resource Center and Nancy Ansheles. For more information on study circles, visit www.studycircles.org.